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RABAT (MCCARY, SOLOMON) PLEASE PASS TO AFRICOM DELEGATION

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/10/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [KPAL](#) [KMFO](#) [EAID](#) [EG](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [SU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SCENE SETTER FOR AFRICOM CONSULTATIONS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stuart Jones
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Introduction -----

¶1. (S) Mr. Henry, we warmly welcome you and your delegation to Cairo for AFRICOM consultations with Ministry of Defense (MoD) officials. A series of difficult, but unrelated issues have brought the mil-to-mil relationship to a sensitive juncture, and your primary interlocutor, Assistant Minister of Defense for Policy MG Mohamed Al Assar, questions overtly the US commitment to the strategic relationship. Because of these tensions, your visit provides a particularly important opportunity for positive engagement on an issue of mutual concern. MoD officials expressed concern that the US did not ask them if Egypt would prefer to be part of CENTCOM or AFRICOM, but they are happy that you have asked to consult with them now. End introduction.

Mil-to-Mil Issues -----

¶2. (C) AFRICOM: On AFRICOM, the Egyptians will complain that we did not consult. In general, the Egyptian military sees AFRICOM as a setback for Egyptian influence in the region. They fashion themselves as the pre-eminent military in Africa. We believe that Al Assar will offer cooperation with AFRICOM that bolsters Egypt's regional influence. We should hear him out and press for specifics. Frankly, this may not be a long discussion, and you may also have an opportunity to address other pressing issues in the relationship.

¶3. (C) FMF: The mil-to-mil relationship, and the US commitment to provide Egypt with USD 1.3 billion in annual Foreign Military Financing (FMF), have been the pillars of the broader bilateral relationship since the Camp David Peace Accords. President Mubarak personally views the FMF as a symbol of the strength of the US-Egyptian partnership. GOE officials consider the FMF "Egypt's money," given unconditionally to be spent as Egypt sees fit. Because of this perspective, MoD officials were furious with the June 5 House Sub-Committee mark-up of the FY2008 Foreign Operations bill. The mark-up proposes to make USD 200 million in FMF conditional on Secretary Rice's certification that Egypt has taken steps to implement legislation to protect the independence of the judiciary, as well as steps to curb police abuses and to counter smuggling along the border with Gaza. Conditioning the assistance, GOE officials have said, will represent a down-grade in the relationship. Some GOE officials also believe that some Administration officials

support conditioning the aid. MG Al Assar will most certainly raise this issue with you. You should reassure him that the US is committed to maintaining a strong relationship with Egypt, but stress the need to demonstrate to Congress the myriad ways in which FMF supports US regional objectives.

¶4. (C) BRIGHT STAR 2007: ADM Fallon recently advised Minister of Defense Field Marshal Tantawi that our troop commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan compelled him to reduce US participation in BRIGHT STAR 2007 to a command post exercise, a senior leaders' seminar, a paratrooper jump, and a small naval exercise. MoD officials have accepted this explanation, but are worried about the future of BRIGHT STAR.

We have also shared with MoD officials that US BRIGHT STAR planners were frustrated with the MoD's reluctance to ensure that exercise costs were not extortionate and that the exercise had some training value. We believe that ADM Fallon's decision to scale back participation this year may increase GOE cooperation in planning future exercises. But MG Al Assar may invoke the downgrade of BRIGHT STAR as an example that the US does not value the bilateral security relationship as much as in the past.

¶5. (C) MFO: Secretary Gates advised Field Marshal Tantawi in April that the US is moving forward with plans to reduce our MFO troop commitment to approximately 200. At Tantawi's request, Secretary Gates agreed to review the proposal. GOE officials are concerned that other nations will reduce their commitment to the MFO if the US reduces its presence. MG Al Assar will likely seek your reassurance that the US has not made a final decision on the reduction. Again, the Egyptians see the MFO reduction as one of a basket of issues in which the US seems to be moving away from Egypt.

Regional Issues

¶6. (C) Egypt's regional influence has waned in recent years, but President Mubarak remains our staunch ally on the issues we care about most. On Israel-Palestine, Egypt is a key mediator, works to strengthen Abu Mazen and Fatah in anticipation of Palestinian elections in the coming year, and will host the next International Quartet meetings in Cairo on June 26-27. Egypt's 750 border guard forces, deployed since September 2005 on the Gaza border, have increased the interdiction of terror-related smuggling attempts through that border. We believe the GOE could do more to combat smuggling. On Iraq, President Mubarak has supported PM Nur al Maliki, despite his personal doubts about Maliki's ability to serve as a national leader, and has called for the US not to withdraw troops precipitously. Deeply suspicious of Iran's growing regional influence, Egypt has rebuffed Tehran's recent requests to normalize relations. On Sudan, Egypt disagrees with US support for sanctions and presses us to focus instead on bringing Darfur rebels into the Darfur Peace Agreement, but has nonetheless offered significant military support (transport, signals, infantry, command, medical) for the UN/AU Heavy Support Package. The UN is still considering Egypt's offer.

Domestic

¶7. (C) Elections for the Shura Council (the "advisory" house of Parliament) will occur on June 11. Candidates will compete for 88 seats in the 264-member Council, and President Hosni Mubarak will appoint another 44 members. The banned Muslim Brotherhood (MB) plans to compete for 19 seats, but GOE detentions of large numbers of campaign organizers in recent weeks has disrupted the group's campaign efforts. We expect that voter turnout will be modest and that the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) candidates will win the majority of contested seats. MoD officials will not raise domestic politics with you, and we suggest you not raise it with them.

JONES